


# Government Survey shows many colonies of bees lost last winter



Bee-keeping is an important occupation, whether it is a pastime or an industry, and not just in the countryside. The Queen keeps bees on the roofs of properties in Regent Street in London and Victor Contini, a restaurateur here in Edinburgh wants to site some beehives on the roof of the National Gallery. As our photos show The President of the United States keeps bees in his garden at the White House.

It is acknowledged that our bees across the world are under threat, and The Scottish Government passed legislation earlier this year to outlaw the use of neonicotinoids by farmers and others in Scotland. These substances are thought to be at least partly responsible for the varroa mite which appears to be decimating the bee population.

It has been announced today that over three quarters of Scottish beekeepers lost at least one colony last winter, according to the first Scottish bee health survey which has just been published. [The survey](#), commissioned by the Scottish Government, was designed to assess the health status of honey bees in Scotland and gain a better understanding of how factors such as husbandry and disease affect them.

 Key results of survey include:

- 39 per cent of beekeepers questioned lost at least one colony during winter 2011-12 and 79 per cent lost at least one colony during winter 2012-13
- Beekeepers identified weather, queen health, starvation and Varroa mites as the main risk factors

- The highest winter losses in 2012-13 were sustained in the Highlands; the lowest losses were in Tayside
- The average Scottish beekeeper has been beekeeping for less than 10 years, manages five or fewer colonies and produces 20-29lb of honey per colony annually
- Foulbrood disease and other notifiable pests were not found outwith known disease areas
- Varroa mites were present in all nine regions inspected, although smaller areas of Varroa freedom may still exist in parts of Scotland

Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead said:

“Bees play a valuable role in our nation’s ecosystem acting as pollinators for many crops and wild plants – as well as producing honey and other products.

“However they can also highlight other issues which may be developing in our environment and that’s why we believe it’s important that we monitor bee health to ensure our bees stay healthy.

“The health survey published today shows that this winter has been a difficult one for many beekeepers and large numbers of colonies have been lost.

“That’s why I recently announced that we would provide £200,000 to help bee farmers restock.

“The survey will provide invaluable information about the spread of diseases throughout Scotland and provide a useful baseline to allow us to monitor the health of our honey bees in future.”

In Scotland there are currently around 1,400 hobby beekeepers who are members of the Scottish Beekeepers Association, with an estimated further 1,000 hobbyists who are not. In addition there are around 25 commercial bee farmers who are members of the Bee Farmers Association and whose businesses depend on the

management of healthy honey bees.

A random sample of Scottish beekeepers took part in the survey which consisted of a questionnaire, inspection of all colonies within the apiary, testing a sample of bees for disease symptoms and one week's collection from a hive debris trap.